

VAIHARAI

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Marriage and Family Life Implications of *Amoris Laetitia*

From Editor's Desk

Nicholoas Stinnett says, "There is a pattern in the rise and fall of great societies. When these societies were at the peak of their power and prosperity, the family was strong and highly valued. When family life became weak in these societies and the family was not valued - when, goals became extremely individualistic - the society began to deteriorate and eventually fall".

The Church has been always showing great concern for the welfare of the family. Several Popes have relentlessly championed the cause of upholding the dignity of the family life. For instance, Pope John Paul II has expressed a similar view in his Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*. Cardinal Christoph Schönborn says that *Amoris Laetitia* constitutes an organic development of *Familiaris Consortio*. The two year process of *Synod on the Vocation and Mission of Family in the Church and in the Contemporary World* was finalized by Pope Francis with the publication of Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* on April 8, 2016. This document is comparatively long, having 9 chapters, 264 pages and over 60000 words.

It expresses hope and faith in families, and is written in a spirit of encouragement and accompaniment of the pastors of the Church.

The salient features of *Amoris Laetitia* are: (1) the document shows that family is a God-given place to members to grow in love, compassion, sanctity, and human virtues and thus to find self-fulfillment and actualization. Thus it is a caring blue-print for family life. (2) The theme of 'love' holds the prime place in the document. It shows that God's way of loving becomes the measure of human love. This in every sense is a celebration of love. (3) It has given a holistic approach to human sexuality, which every person needs to accept as a great gift from God. (4) The document abounds with exhortation on pastoral mercy and invites pastors to render unlimited compassionate pastoral care to the people of God. (5) It has given a comprehensive treatment on the role of children in the family, parents' inalienable duty towards them and necessary care and protection they require from the society. (6) By upholding the dignity of conscience the document points out that individual conscience needs to be better incorporated into the Church's praxis. (7) The document insists upon marital spirituality as an essential ingredient for the family to be a vital cell for transforming the world.

This papal document gets enormous publicity and wider circulation and is highly appreciated by a number of great scholars. For instance, Cardinal Walter Kasper expresses

his view that "*Amoris Laetitia* does not change anything of Church doctrine or of canon law – but it changes everything. The Pope has made the shift by putting doctrine into a 'new perspective'. It is not about changing rules or making exceptions but leaving room for 'Christian freedom of conscience'. " Nevertheless, in a few quarters of the Church it has not been received warmly and some dismiss it as old wine in a new wine skin. However, it could be concluded that the document has been enthusiastically welcomed by most Catholics.

The traditional Catholic marriage and family are in crisis worldwide and it has affected the Western world more deeply than the East. The profile of crisis shows that the number of dysfunctional and broken families is on the rise. This disturbing and unfortunate trend badly affects the individuals, families and the society at large. Hence we deem it relevant to discuss this problem elaborately in this issue.

We present here five articles on the theme of marriage and family in the light of *Amoris Laetitia*. Dr John Kulandai in his article deals with the challenges and the opportunities faced in families in India today. He looks at the unique nature of the Indian marriage system with a positive note and also discusses its merits and demerits. Dr Dionysius discusses the different aspects of family in the Bible and concludes that the family plays a vital role in shaping the personality of people. According to him, it is

the family that teaches moral values to people and passes on to them the spiritual and cultural heritage of the society. Dr A. Albert, through his reflections, examines the theological and pastoral issue of sharing the Eucharist with the non-Catholic partner in interchurch marriages. He discusses the obstacles to Eucharistic sharing with the non-Catholic partner as well as the reasons favorable for sharing Eucharist with the non-Catholic partner. Dr Mary John in his article explains the basic elements of catechesis which are to be nurtured in family catechesis. He also discusses the objectives of family catechesis derived from the general objective, the faith formation. According to him, the challenging family experiences must be converted into catechetive experiences. He feels that sufficient attention has not been given to formal family catechesis and recommends that all efforts must be taken to initiate formal family catechesis. Dr Metti Amirtham brings out the significant challenges in the light of *Amoris Laetitia* that emerge from today's marriages and family life. In order to address these challenges she proposes pastoral guidelines from *Amoris Laetitia* to bishops and priests to enable the Catholic faithful to live a happy married life.

Dr A. Albert
Editor